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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: UNITY TEAM BRIEFS KOSOVO ASSEMBLY ON
STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Unity Team (UT) members briefed the Kosovo Assembly in an open, televised session on the ongoing final status negotiations. The presentation was generally well received by MPs, although some expressed opposition to negotiated independence. Late distribution of the UT's materials also caused complaints; as a result, discussion will continue on September 5. The session was a positive step in keeping the Kosovar public informed on key issues involving final status. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) In an open, televised session on September 1, UT members briefed the Kosovo Assembly on the ongoing final status negotiations. UT members praised the work of UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari and his team, while also presenting a positive assessment of their own work. They highlighted the remaining differences between the UT and UNOSCE (the office of the UN Special Envoy for Kosovo), including the proposal to attach the Serb municipality of Zvecan to north Mitrovica; minority representation in the Assembly; and vertical links between Serb-majority municipalities and Belgrade.

¶3. (U) Opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) leader and UT member Hashim Thaci, while noting the UT's accomplishments, could not resist the opportunity to accuse the Kosovo government of corruption and incompetence. He said that PDK's presence on the UT in no way "grants immunity" to the government's policies that "impoverish" Kosovars and "enrich" groups heavily involved in organized crime. The other opposition member of the UT, Veton Surroi, was more circumspect, sticking mainly to his script on minority issues (Surroi has taken the lead in the UT's discussions with UNOSCE on minority rights). Surroi was definite, however, that the Albanians would stand by their proposal on Mitrovica, which calls for division of the city into two municipalities and the creation of a joint administrative board with limited competencies. He also said the Team wanted further clarification on the transitional arrangements for Kosovo post-UNMIK now being contemplated by the international community.

¶4. (U) The UT's presentation was generally well received by MPs, and even those who complained began with praise for the team's efforts. Several challenged the very notion of

negotiating status at all. They also criticized police violence against those protesting the negotiations during Special Envoy Ahtisaari's last visit to Pristina, and the granting of "excessive" advantages to minorities. A number of MPs objected to decentralization along ethnic lines. However, the most common complaint was procedural: MPs were given over 100 pages of material on the negotiations only minutes before the session began. As a result, the Assembly will meet again on September 5 to continue the discussion.

¶5. (U) Comment: We have encouraged the UT to keep the public informed about the key issues in the ongoing status negotiations, or else risk unhelpful speculation in the media and from extremists. This is a good first step in that direction. The team performed reasonably well in its first public presentation, though the predictable fault lines did emerge when Thaci took the opportunity to jab at his government teammates. The UT's public appearance is a definite plus, though it may also make it harder for the Team to make concessions on issues particularly neuralgic for the wider Kosovar audience, including Mitrovica. End Comment.

¶6. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW